

**Safety and Support Equipment for Public Health Nurses,  
Probation Officers, Social Workers and Front Line Staff**

**FY2003 Request: \$1,314,554**  
**Reference No: 32446**

**AP/AL:** Appropriation

**Project Type:** Equipment

**Category:** Health/Safety

**Location:** Statewide

**Contact:** Larry Streuber

**Election District:** Statewide

**Contact Phone:** (907)465-1870

**Estimated Project Dates:** 07/01/2002 - 06/30/2007

**Brief Summary and Statement of Need:**

Project would provide funds for critical equipment needed by the Department to enhance security, improve program efficiency and replace aging or dysfunctional equipment for the Department's statewide operations. Older or unsuitable vehicles have been identified as the most dangerous equipment and as a priority for replacement. There is an urgent need for this equipment so that Family and Youth Service social workers, Juvenile Justice detention and probation officers, Public Health nurses, and Public Assistance staff can perform their duties safely and effectively. Failure to fund some equipment purchases will mean that they may not be able to do their job or may be placed in danger.

**Funding:**

	FY2003	FY2004	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	Total
Fed Rcpts	\$714,244	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$2,714,244
G/F Match	\$600,310	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	\$8,100,310
Total:	\$1,314,554	\$1,900,000	\$1,900,000	\$1,900,000	\$1,900,000	\$1,900,000	\$10,814,554

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> State Match Required	<input type="checkbox"/> One-Time Project	<input type="checkbox"/> Phased Project	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> On-Going Project
46% = Minimum State Match % Required	<input type="checkbox"/> Amendment	<input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health Bill	

**Operating & Maintenance Costs:**

	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Staff</u>
Total Operating Impact:	0	0
One-Time Startup Costs:	0	
Additional Estimated Annual O&M:	0	0

**Prior Funding History / Additional Information:**

CH61/SLA01/P19/L11 – \$200.0 GF and \$2,331.0 Federal

CH135/SLA00/P14/L21 – \$163.2 AHFC Dividends and \$38.9 Federal

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This project includes a broad range of equipment needed for the Department's operations. It is the intent of the Department that funds will be used for the acquisition of equipment necessary to improve security for Public Health nurses, Family and Youth Services staff, and staff and clients at all facilities operated by the Department. Funds would also be available for items such as needed clinical equipment at public health centers and transportation equipment. Due to the changing nature of priorities and emerging situations, funds may be shifted between divisions if warranted.

The need for transportation is a high priority for two reasons—the reduced amount that was appropriated in FY02 for vehicles, and because worker's case loads continue to increase, requiring more frequent use of vehicles for longer periods of time for State employees in highly contentious situations. The amounts requested represent the minimum safety and support equipment needed for Department staff to function. The items in this request are urgently needed. Worker safety and efficiency demand that staff be adequately equipped. While many needs can be postponed, the current request involves items that are needed for workers to function safely and effectively.

**Vehicle Needs Analysis**

The Department surveyed available vehicles in the *DHSS Comprehensive Vehicle Analysis* report (copies of the report are available upon request.) The report identified, by division and field location, the number of vehicles available and the ratio of relevant field staff to vehicles. The study identified which vehicles were leased by the Department and which were owned. In some cases vehicle credits are available to replace aging vehicles. In the following cases, however, capital funds may be needed for vehicles:

- to replace leased vehicles
- to acquire additional vehicles because of increased work loads, staffing levels or new facilities;
- to replace existing vehicles that have already been depreciated out, where replacement credits were used for another vehicle.

The ratio of relevant direct field office staff to vehicles in some locations is 12.6 and higher, which is clearly unacceptable. This request attempts to alleviate only the major deficiencies documented in the *Comprehensive Vehicle Analysis* report.

**A. Division of Family and Youth Services (\$683.4)**

The Department of Health and Social Services requests \$683.4 in capital funds for the Division of Family and Youth Services (DFYS) to provide DFYS front line workers with basic operating equipment and safe, reliable vehicles.

**Office Automation and Replacement of Dysfunctional Equipment, \$160.4** - Needed to provide basic operating and safety equipment for the 29 Field Offices located in the four DFYS regions (Anchorage, Southcentral, Northern, and Southeast). A survey of our field offices indicates that basic operating equipment is aging and needs to be replaced. For example, field office copiers average between 3 to 7 years old, faxes 4 to 9 years, and the telephones over 10 years. The inability to replace this basic equipment is an impediment which undermines our front line workers' ability to perform their function of protecting Alaska's children from abuse and neglect.

**Vehicles, \$385.4** - Thirteen vehicles are needed in the four DFYS regions. Currently the Division has an inadequate number of vehicles given the Statewide presence of DFYS and the number of front line workers that need access to vehicles. DFYS social workers and social services associates typically spend between 50-60% of their working week out of the office performing investigations, conducting home visits, going to court, transporting children, attending case planning meetings, and performing other case-related activities. With the exception of transporting children, field workers must frequently use their personal vehicles to conduct these activities when a State-owned vehicle is not available. For example, in the Anchorage Field Office there are currently only 8 vehicles that must be shared by over 89 workers in the investigations, permanency planning, and licensing units (over 11.1 workers per vehicle). The Division's goal is to have a vehicle for every 2 social workers. This request will provide a vehicle for every 4 social workers in the Anchorage field office.

In a recent incident a DFYS worker was threatened by a highly enraged person brandishing a firearm. Other real hazards faced by workers and the children they transport include heavy snowfall, extreme temperatures, and bad roads. Our workers must have the basic resources, including a sufficient number of vehicles, that they need to perform their jobs and get themselves and the children that they are charged to protect out of potentially dangerous situations. Reliance upon the use of employee-owned vehicles to respond to reports of harm or to transport children exposes the employee-transporter and the State to potential liability.

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This shortage of vehicles is not a matter of inconvenience, but is one of safety and liability. For example, a social worker performs a routine home visit, finds that a child or children are being abused or neglected and determines that the child or children must be taken into emergency custody. A vehicle was unavailable, and the worker had to take their personal vehicle. The worker must call the field office to request a transport. In the meantime, the child's (children's) parent becomes agitated and hostile. The emotionally charged nature of this type of situation can quickly escalate into violence.

The Union has filed a class action grievance against the State for instructing the employees to use their personal vehicle to conduct client home visits and community visits. The State made this request to the employees due to lack of adequate vehicles in the field office to conduct the necessary visits. The Union is citing this as contract violation and an enormous safety risk to workers. The Union's concern is that when employees use their personal vehicles for investigation or transporting clients, their vehicles are being tracked and become a safety threat to the employees. Another impact of inadequate vehicles is the difficulty of recruiting and retaining social workers. DFYS experienced an employee turnover of 25% of the work force in FY2001, and lack of adequate vehicles is becoming an obstacle for recruiting social workers.

The following table outlines the minimal need for additional DFYS vehicles in FY03:

	Current # of Vehicles	# of Direct Staff	Current # of Direct Staff per Vehicle	# of Vehicles Needed	Amount Requested
Anchorage	8	89	11.1	10	\$291,667
*Craig	1	2	2	1	\$31,250
*Nome	1	4	4	1	\$31,250
*Unalaska	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>\$31,250</u>
Totals:	11	97	19.1	13	\$385,417

Number of Division of Family & Youth Services Direct Staff includes Social Services Associates I-III, Social Workers I-IV and Community Care License Specialist I-II only.

\* Craig, Nome and Unalaska field offices have one vehicle each, but need to upgrade to a vehicle for dirt roads, to obtain 4-wheel drive, and to meet the arctic conditions. Costs shown for vehicles are in addition to credits available.

**Anchorage and Mat-Su Equipment Needs, \$137.6** – Approximately 60% of the workers have been sharing offices with co-workers in these field offices. Lack of private offices impacts effective communication between the workers and their clients. Clients are willing to communicate more openly when they have privacy. Increased caseload resulted in the need for more visitation rooms for children with their biological parents and foster parents. Inadequate and inefficient space in the Anchorage and Mat-Su field offices have been affecting employee morale and efficiency of the workers.

DFYS is requesting an increment in the FY03 operating budget to procure additional space for these field offices. DFYS is currently working on an RFP to procure additional space for the Anchorage field office. In order to improve the efficiency of the work space, office furniture and equipment need to be replaced. The Anchorage field office would need a one-time purchase of \$444.3, and Mat-Su needs \$78.0 to purchase the necessary office furniture and equipment. Not all of these purchases will be made with this appropriation. The remainder will be deferred until FY03. Office systems furniture will provide our Anchorage and Mat-Su locations with efficient, functional work space. Efficient, well-organized work space enables our social work staff to concentrate on the critical task of protecting the children in the State's custody.

**B. Division of Public Health (\$60.1)**

The Public Health Nursing Section needs vehicles to improve the safety and productivity of its employees and improve their ability to provide important health services to Alaskans.

**New Safe Vehicles and Replacement Vehicles (\$60.1)**

Many older vehicles leased from DOT have repeated mechanical problems. Because nursing staff need to drive, during all seasons and over difficult roads in isolated, rural and remote areas, their safety and the State's liability are concerns. The lack of vehicles has been documented in the recent *DHSS Comprehensive Vehicle Analysis* report. Costs for new vehicles are estimated at \$27,100 each per 4WD utility vehicle. Requested funds provide for two vehicles for which no vehicle credits are available and for vehicles for which credits will partially pay for the reimbursement.

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New vehicles to be purchased (No Vehicle credits available)

Delta Junction	4WD Utility vehicle	\$27,100
Cordova	4WD Utility vehicle	\$27,100
<b>Total New Vehicles</b>		<b>\$54,200</b>

There is a full-time nurse in Delta Junction who also provides services to the surrounding road areas, travels to Fairbanks regularly, and picks up vaccines and supplies. There is no State vehicle for her to use for this work travel. Public Health is re-establishing the Cordova PHN office in September 2001 and will need for a State vehicle for that office.

Replacement Vehicles

Most of the vehicles on the unsafe list from the FY02 Capital request will be replaced with FY02 Capital funds. Several others remain a concern. They are still on the list of vehicles known to be unsafe, and capital funds appropriated for FY02 are not sufficient to replace them. The remaining funds from this request will be applied to these vehicles.

<u>Location</u>	<u>Vehicle request</u>	<u>Vehicle Number</u>
Bethel	Replace 1991 Utility Wagon	30085
Ketchikan	Replace 1991 Utility Wagon	30029
Tok	Replace 1993 Utility Wagon	30852
<b>Total to be applied:</b>		<b>\$5,866</b>

**C. Division of Juvenile Justice (\$40.6)**

This project will provide for vehicles for probation officers to increase their contact with juveniles in the community.

**Vehicles (\$40.6)** - As shown in the most recent *DHSS Comprehensive Vehicle Analysis*, the current number of Probation Services personnel per vehicle in the field for DJJ is 2.8. Also, additional vehicles are necessary for the pilot programs that place probation staff in communities. Their presence in communities has been proven to be a deterrent to juvenile delinquency. This FY03 request will be applied toward funding additional vehicle purchases for probation offices in Fairbanks and Anchorage. As a division, Juvenile Justice has set a goal of bringing the probation personnel per vehicle ratio to 2.0 to 1.

**D. Division of Public Assistance (\$530.6)**

**Front-Line Public Assistance Worker Safety and Support Equipment**

Safety, health, and productivity of staff and security of client records are the major goals. Funds are needed to provide secure and safe work surfaces in four regions: Anchorage, Coastal, Southeast and Northern. Capital funds will be utilized to ensure that these offices have the resources they need to perform the critical function of providing Alaskans with safety net programs and opportunities to achieve an improved quality of life. This project is intended to make records more secure and offices safe and more efficient by providing work surfaces that reduce workplace hazards and fatigue of Public Assistance staff who use a computer workstations for more than four hours per day.

In general, field offices have not had work surface upgrades in most offices in over a decade. Currently field offices have a mixture of old conventional furniture, with desks and data tables of various sizes. Other furniture is of various ages, types and colors, such as bookshelves and non-locking older two-and four-drawer file cabinets. Some offices have a mixture of various height and colored partitions. Offices such as Nome have desks over 20 years old.

The conventional work surfaces and storage in field offices do not support proper ergonomics. The use of non-ergonomically adjustable work surfaces along with an increase in the amount of staff time spent at a computer increases the cost to the State in Workers Compensation claims, absenteeism, and requests for special accommodations.

Of particular importance is ensuring the security of the agency's resources and records and compliance with Titles I and II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If approved, this project would be used to purchase and install approximately 135 work surfaces, one reception area, and three or more conference areas.